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NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

Navy Medicine Civil Servant Leaves Behind Legacy

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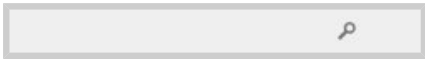
The ultimate goal to defend national security, to belong to something bigger than himself, and to follow his father’s legacy in federal service, was one man’s mission in life. Determination and drive have always been a part of Jerry LaCamera’s makeup. Ever since he was 12-years old, he diligently put money away from odd jobs to pay for his own high school and college education, taking the burden off of his parents and family. He knew early on the importance of having a plan and seeing it through, while never forgetting the value of family.

After nearly four decades and 13 different positions in civil service, Jerry LaCamera, SES, retired from the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED), is leaving behind a legacy of dedicated service and contributions.



Jerry LaCamera, SES, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) speaks with Vice Adm. Matthew Nathan, Navy surgeon general and chief, BUMED, at his retirement ceremony after nearly four decades of service. (Photo by Valerie Kremer)

A native Washingtonian, LaCamera was surrounded by federal service and the military from a young age. His father proudly served for four years during World War II in the U.S. Army Air



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Corps, the predecessor to the U.S. Air Force. Before his dad went off to war, LaCamera's parents were married. His mother, a federal worker in the administrative and technical field, left civil service to raise five children.

"We had a very strong family," LaCamera said. "After dad's military service, he became a career federal worker for the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Mom stayed at home and had the 'harder' job of raising five kids."

After graduating from Washington D.C.-area Archbishop Carroll High School in 1971, LaCamera attended Catholic University to pursue Bachelor's and Master's degrees in mechanical engineering. LaCamera began his federal career in October 1974 with the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a senior in college. In June of 1975, he began his career with the U.S. Department of the Navy.

"I started in the research and development field at the Naval Surface Warfare Center White Oak Lab in Maryland," LaCamera recalled. "This provided a great technical foundation for me as a young engineer. Later, upon the urging from my first supervisor, I applied, and was selected to the Weapons Systems Management Development Program (WSMDP), which was a mid-career development program run by Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) at the time."

LaCamera's Navy career was set in motion by being one of five selected to attend the highly competitive three-year rotational program.



Members of the Weapons Systems Management Development Program in 1979. From left to right: Frank W. Moitoza, J. Jerry LaCamera, Jr., Robert C. Gorby, Phillip J. Hornick and Raymond J. Patala, Jr. (Photo courtesy of Jerry LaCamera)

"Next thing I knew I was moving across the country to Washington state and then I moved seven more times in three years all over the country," LaCamera said. "I had rotational tours in four Navy warfare centers, two university labs, and tours with industry and the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA)."

"It was one of the most significant turning points in my career," LaCamera noted. "I wrote many technical papers, and had great experiences, aboard submarines, opportunities to ride on the Navy's aircraft and surface ships, and see weapons in action during exercises – it was a great experience. It was during this time I learned I wanted to transition into program management."

On completing the WSMDP, LaCamera was reassigned in 1982 to a new submarine ACAT ID missile development program at NAVSEA headquarters where he worked several years as System Training and Education manager and later as deputy division director for Lightweight Torpedoes. Afterwards, LaCamera attended the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) and became Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) certified as Level III in program management, a skill and passion that he would carry for the rest of his federal service.

After a series of engineering positions within NAVSEA and completing the DSMC Program Manager's course, LaCamera became the Assistant Program Executive Officer (PEO) and

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performed the duties of Deputy PEO for one of his key mentors, Dan Porter.

“At that time the Navy was just implementing the requirements of Goldwater-Nichols and standing up Program Executive Offices, or PEOs,” LaCamera said. “One of the PEOs being stood up was in Undersea Warfare and Undersea Weapons and Combat Systems. Mr. Dan Porter was the first civilian to hold the position of PEO and worked directly for Mr. Gerry Cann, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research Development and Acquisition (ASN RD&A).”

LaCamera knew at that point he wanted to run his own large program.

“My real goal at the time was to become a program manager for one of the ACAT ID Major Defense Acquisition Programs (MDAPs).” LaCamera said. “These programs are highly complex technical endeavors, which exceed a billion dollars in Total Life Cycle Costs and are designated by the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics.”

In the early 1990s, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the emphasis on anti-submarine warfare declined and shifted to ballistic missile threats and terrorism. Anti-submarine warfare became less of a focus, LaCamera noted, and the Navy faced a significant challenge to sustain its capabilities in Undersea Weapons. Dan Porter asked him to be the deputy to the Heavyweight Torpedo Project Manager and help to develop a plan to consolidate all undersea weapons into one program office. “What was a billion dollar a year investment came down to approximately \$300 million a year investment over a period of five years,” LaCamera said. “We knew we had to do something significant. We put together a proposal to consolidate all five of the anti-submarine warfare weapons systems programs under a single program manager and program office called Undersea Weapons Program Office. This allowed for some very tough decisions to consolidate worldwide maintenance and depot facilities to lower operations and maintenance costs and prepare for the end of all up round production.”

The program managed all lightweight torpedoes, heavyweight torpedoes, and other undersea weapons systems. LaCamera remained as deputy program manager for about two more years until another door would open.

LaCamera’s dream became a reality when he was selected as an ACAT ID program manager by the PEO for Theater Surface Combatants (PEO TSC) and ASN RDA.

“At that time, the Navy had made progress in demonstrating capabilities for defending against the growing Ballistic Missile threat,” LaCamera said. “It had succeeded in ‘opening the door a bit’ to the missile defense program that was run from the Office of the Secretary of Defense under the Ballistic Missile Defense Office, which later became the Missile Defense Agency.”

LaCamera’s former colleague, Vice Adm. James Syring, the current director, Missile Defense Agency, was LaCamera’s guest speaker during his retirement ceremony May 2, at the Women in Service Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery, just a short distance from where LaCamera’s parents are buried. Syring spoke of LaCamera’s unwavering commitment to his country and efforts while at NAVSEA.

“Our defense today at sea, with 30 ships and our defense around the globe, is built on a lot of the groundwork and achievements that Jerry LaCamera and his program team created while he was the program manager of the Navy Area Defense Theater Ballistic Missile Defense Program (TBMD),” Syring said. “On his watch, the technical advances and challenges that he had to overcome were immense but he did it and stood tall through it all. Jerry has gone beyond the call of duty and service to our country.”

LaCamera followed his term as an ACAT ID Program Manager with obtaining a second Master’s

degree as a Distinguished Graduate, graduating in the top 10 % of his 2003 Class from the Industrial College of Armed Forces at National Defense University. He later served as the Senior Civilian and Technical Director/Operations Manager of Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head Division where he developed a long term strategy and sustainment of the explosives and energetics industrial base and capability for the U.S. Navy and DoD.

LaCamera noted that the many positions he held within NAVSEA and the Warfare Centers allowed him to follow his passion for engineering and leading large organizations and complex programs, before coming to the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) as the deputy chief, M1, and director, Total Force.

“Complex programs are some of the most challenging and interesting endeavors from an engineering perspective,” LaCamera said. “They require bringing the talents of a highly-diverse, highly-capable team of specialties together towards a common objective and then moving the program into a deliverable capability you could introduce to the fleet. Navy Medicine is similar in that it involves complex life-sciences comprising many highly diverse disciplines that take years of training, education, and development. When you bring them together in an integrated way, you ultimately create world-class medical care in both operational and clinical settings.”

During his six-year tenure at BUMED, LaCamera worked to defend total force requirements in the Navy Medicine enterprise, which has a dual mission of providing operational medicine on, above and below the sea, while running a global health care system.

“I have always loved my time working for the Navy,” LaCamera said. “The Navy was always willing to take a chance and gave me a bit more responsibility than I would have given to myself. As a result, I was allowed the opportunity to take risks in an environment with great and supportive leadership. I have been blessed with many great mentors and bosses and with colleagues and coworkers who worked as a team to get things done.”

At LaCamera’s retirement ceremony, Vice Adm. Matthew Nathan, Navy surgeon general and chief, BUMED, reflected on the SES’s Navy career and value to Navy Medicine.

“Jerry LaCamera has been an outstanding member of the Navy Medicine team,” Nathan said. “His hard work, dedication, and approach to dealing with large, complex programs have helped to shape Navy Medicine into the total force capability that we have today and will for years to come. His vision, as we move forward, will be greatly missed.”

During the retirement ceremony, Nathan remarked on the value LaCamera placed on his family and mission achievement.

“No one who has ever met Jerry LaCamera will understand why he spent 39 years giving back to his country, doing things where he could have gone other places and made more money,” Nathan said. “I believe he did it all so he could make this world a better place not just for the Navy, not just for the country, but for his family.”

Over LaCamera’s nearly 40-year career, he has been awarded the Sustained Superior Civilian Service and the OSD Meritorious Civilian Service Medals. At his ceremony and on behalf of the Secretary of the Navy, Vice Adm. Nathan presented LaCamera with the Distinguished Civilian Service Medal, one of the highest distinctions awarded to civilians.



About vjohnson

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